

REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE LEO BERNIER,
MINISTER OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS
FOR AN OPENING STATEMENT TO
THE CONFERENCE OF NORTHERN MINISTERS
FORT McMURRAY, ALBERTA, SEPTEMBER 27, 1978

Mr. Chairman:

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THE GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN ONTARIO WHICH I WOULD
LIKE TO SHARE WITH THE CONFERENCE.

ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO HAS BEEN INVOLVED
IN SPECIFIC PROGRAMS FOR NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT SINCE THE
TURN OF THE CENTURY, THE MINISTRY OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS
WAS NOT FORMALLY ESTABLISHED UNTIL 38 MONTHS AGO.

THE MINISTRY HAS TWO BASIC FUNCTIONS:

TO ENSURE THAT RESIDENTS OF NORTHERN ONTARIO HAVE THE
SAME ACCESS TO THE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES OF THE
GOVERNMENT AS THESE RESIDENCE IN THE PROVINCE
AND

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MR. CHAIRMAN:

IN KEEPING WITH THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CONFERENCE I HAVE PREPARED A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE AND MANDATE OF THE MINISTRY OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS WHICH I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH THE CONFERENCE.

ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN SPECIFIC PROGRAMS FOR NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT SINCE THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, THE MINISTRY OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS WAS NOT FORMALLY ESTABLISHED UNTIL 18 MONTHS AGO.

THE MINISTRY HAS TWO BASIC FUNCTIONS:

TO ENSURE THAT RESIDENTS OF NORTHERN ONTARIO HAVE THE SAME ACCESS TO THE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES OF THE GOVERNMENT AS THOSE ELSEWHERE IN THE PROVINCE
AND

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TO ENSURE THAT THE SPECIAL NEEDS AND CONDITIONS IN THE NORTH ARE CONSIDERED AND ACCOMMODATED IN ALL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS DEVELOPED BY GOVERNMENT.

NORTHERN ONTARIO OCCUPIES A VAST PORTION OF CANADA. IT IS LARGER THAN MANY PROVINCES; IT IS BIGGER THAN FRANCE AND GERMANY COMBINED. HALIFAX AND MIAMI ARE CLOSER TO THE SEAT OF GOVERNMENT AT TORONTO THAN SOME SETTLEMENTS IN NORTHERN ONTARIO.

BUT THIS HUGE AREA ... ABOUT 90 PER CENT OF THE LAND MASS OF ONTARIO ... IS OCCUPIED BY LESS THAN 10 PER CENT OF THE POPULATION. IT HAS ONLY A FEW LARGE CITIES SUCH AS SUDBURY, TIMMINS, SAULT STE. MARIE, NORTH BAY AND THUNDER BAY. THE BALANCE OF THE POPULATION IS SCATTERED IN SMALL, MAIN SINGLE-INDUSTRY, SETTLEMENTS SEPARATED BY VAST DISTANCE.

IN THE CREATION OF A MINISTRY OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS, THE EXISTING NORTHERN PROGRAMS AND RELATED FUNDING, AND A NUMBER OF GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS WERE PULLED TOGETHER AND GIVEN SPECIFIC FOCUS.

THE KEYSTONE OF THE MINISTRY'S BRIDGE BETWEEN QUEEN'S PARK AND THE RESIDENTS OF THE NORTH IS THE 32 NORTHERN AFFAIRS OFFICERS. THIS CORP OF MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE STRATEGICALLY LOCATED THROUGHOUT THE NORTH PROVIDES A SINGLE WINDOW FOR ACCESS TO ALL GOVERNMENT SERVICES NOT AVAILABLE ELSEWHERE IN THE COMMUNITY.

WE HAVE PRODUCED A FILM WHICH PROVIDES A VERY GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION OF EXACTLY WHAT THE OFFICERS DO AND HOW THEY AND PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE FEEL ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE ATTEMPTING TO DO. WE HAVE A COPY WITH US, WHICH WE COULD ARRANGE TO SHOW OR WE CAN LEND IT TO ANYONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO VIEW IT LATER.

WHILE THE MORE OBVIOUS FUNCTION OF THE OFFICERS IS TO RESPOND DIRECTLY TO INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY NEEDS WITHIN EXISTING PROGRAMS, THEY HAVE A SECOND BUT EQUALY IMPORTANT ADVISORY FUNCTION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MINISTRY STRATEGY AND INITIATIVES ON A BROAD BASIS.

THIS ADVICE FROM STAFF WHO ARE IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN ONTARIO IS ESSENTIAL IF WE ARE TO CARRY OUT OUR MAIN FUNCTION OF PROVIDING A NORTHERN VIEWPOINT TO GOVERNMENT POLICY AND PROGRAMS.

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WE ARE A SMALL MINISTRY IN TERMS OF THE MANPOWER RESOURCE AT THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT. AT FULL STRENGTH WE HAVE ONLY 169 EMPLOYEES LOCATED IN 34 OFFICES.

OF THESE, 48 STAFF ARE LOCATED IN TORONTO AND THE BALANCE ARE BASED IN NORTHERN ONTARIO. WE HAVE TWO REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS IN SAULT STE. MARIE AND KENORA, HEADED BY ASSISTANT DEPUTY MINISTERS HERB AIKEN AND BILL CHARLTON, WHO ARE WITH ME FOR THIS CONFERENCE.

EACH REGIONAL OFFICE HAS A REGIONAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BRANCH AND A COMMUNITY RELATIONS BRANCH TO OVERSEE THE CONCERNs OF EACH REGION. STAFF IN THE NORTHEAST REGION TOTALS 72 AND 49 IN THE NORTHWEST.

IN ADDITION TO THE MINISTRY STAFF, I HAVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION WHICH OPERATES RAIL, BUS AND HIGHWAY TRANSPORT SERVICE, NORTHERN TELECOMMUNICATIONS, NORONTAIR, THE CHI-CHEEMAUN FERRY BETWEEN TOBERMORY AND MANITOULIN ISLAND AND THE CHIEF COMMANDA CRUISE BOAT ON LAKE NIPISSING ALONG WITH A LODGE AND GOOSE HUNTING CAMP AT MOOSONEE.

THE ONTC EMPLOYS MORE THAN 2,000 PEOPLE AND HAS AN OPERATING BUDGET OF MORE THAN \$60 MILLION.

APART FROM OUR SMALL SIZE, THE OTHER UNUSUAL FEATURE OF THE MINISTRY OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS IS THE SPECIAL STATUS OF THE MINISTER WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE GOVERNMENT.

I AM SURE THAT MOST OF YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE OF THE ONTARIO CABINET IN WHICH MINISTRIES OF SIMILAR INTERESTS ARE GROUPED WITHIN ONE OF THREE POLICY FIELDS, RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE. WE ARE THE ONLY MINISTRY WITH MEMBERSHIP IN ALL THREE. IN ADDITION, THE MINISTER OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS IS A MEMBER OF MANAGEMENT BOARD...THAT IS OUR TREASURY BOARD.

THESE ARE THE CONDUITS WHICH GIVE US ACCESS TO POLICY DEVELOPMENT ON A GOVERNMENT-WIDE BASIS AND ALLOW US TO EXERT A NORTHERN INFLUENCE ON THE PROGRAMS OF OTHER MINISTRIES WHICH HAVE EITHER GENERAL OR SPECIFIC APPLICATION IN THE NORTH.

COUPLED WITH THIS UNIQUE ACCESS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE IS A VERY GENEROUS BUDGET WHICH HAS BEEN PROGRESSIVELY INCREASED OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS IN SPITE OF GOVERNMENT-WIDE RESTRAINT AND A NUMBER OF SPECIFIC REDUCTIONS.

I AM SURE THAT IT IS OBVIOUS TO EVERYONE THAT A MINISTRY OF 169 PEOPLE SPREAD ACROSS NORTHERN ONTARIO COULD NOT POSSIBLY CARRY OUT ALL THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND OPERATIONAL FUNCTIONS IMPLICIT IN A BUDGET OF ALMOST \$140 MILLION, WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THE OPERATIONAL MINISTRIES.

I SHOULD POINT OUT THAT MOST GOVERNMENT SERVICES IN NORTHERN ONTARIO - THE BUILDING OF ROADS AND AIRPORTS; THE OPERATION OF HOSPITALS AND DENTAL SERVICES; THE DELIVERY OF RECREATIONAL AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS; EDUCATION AND SO ON ... WERE PROVIDED BY OUR LINE MINISTRIES LONG BEFORE THE CONCEPT OF THE MINISTRY OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS EMERGED.

THE PROBLEM FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTH WAS NOT WITH THE RESPONSIBLE MINISTRIES THEMSELVES...THEY DO AN EXCELLENT JOB...BUT RATHER IN A WIDELY HELD FEELING THAT THE SPECIAL NEEDS AND PRIORITIES OF THE NORTH WERE NOT ADEQUATELY CONSIDERED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND THE DELIVERY OF GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS.

IN THIS REGARD IT IS RATHER INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT OUR OMBUDSMAN IN HIS LATEST REPORT SAYS THAT THE NUMBER OF INQUIRIES AND COMPLAINTS HE RECEIVED FROM NORTHERN ONTARIO ARE DISPROPORTIONATE TO THE REST OF THE PROVINCE.

I AM NOT SURPRISED BY THIS AS A NORTHERN MEMBER AND AS A MINISTER WITH A NORTHERN RESPONSIBILITY. IN DESIGNING PROVINCE-WIDE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS IT IS OFTEN DIFFICULT AND COSTLY TO ACCOMMODATE SPECIFIC REGIONAL DIFFERENCES.

THIS IS WHERE WE ENTER THE PICTURE.

I OFFER YOU TWO ILLUSTRATIONS.

THE ONTARIO FIRE MARSHAL WORKS WITH ALL MUNICIPALITIES IN ONTARIO TO DEVELOP FIRE PREVENTION AND FIRE PROTECTION PROGRAMS. HIS STAFF ADVISES ON STANDARDS, EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING TO REDUCE THE UNNECESSARY LOSS OF LIFE AND PROPERTY FROM FIRE.

THIS LOSS IS PARTICULARLY ACUTE IN REMOTE OR SPARSELY SETTLED COMMUNITIES WHICH LACK BOTH FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND THE MUNICIPAL STRUCTURE TO DEVELOP A CONVENTIONAL FIRE BRIGADE.

TO OVERCOME THIS WE PROVIDED \$330,000 LAST YEAR TO BUY SIX SPECIALLY DESIGNED PUMPER TRUCKS AND 17 PACKAGES OF EQUIPMENT FOR DESIGNATED COMMUNITIES.

THE RESIDENTS OF THESE COMMUNITIES STARTED VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES AND WERE TRAINED IN FIRE FIGHTING METHODS BY THE FIRE MARSHAL'S STAFF. THEY ALSO UNDERTOOK TO HOUSE AND MAINTAIN THE PUMPER TRUCKS OR THE FIRE FIGHTING PACKAGES.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE IS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHEASTERN ONTARIO -- FROM NORTH BAY NORTH THROUGH COBALT, KIRKLAND LAKE, TIMMINS AND UP TO MOOSONEE ON JAMES BAY.

FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, ONE OF THE SUMMER ATTRACTIONS IN THIS AREA HAS BEEN THE POLAR BEAR EXPRESS EXCURSION TRAIN OF THE ONTARIO NORTHLAND RAILWAY WHICH OPERATED DAY TRIPS FROM COCHRANE TO MOOSONEE.

BY WORKING WITH THE RAILWAY, COMMUNITIES, TOURISM ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER MINISTRIES WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO IMPROVE AND PUBLICIZE THE ATTRACTION IN THE REGION. THIS HAS RESULTED IN MORE VISITORS WHO HAVE GAINED A FAVORABLE IMPRESSION OF THE AREA.

I COULD RECOUNT A NUMBER OF OTHER EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE EITHER OUR CO-ORDINATING ROLE OR OUR USE OF SPECIAL FUNDING TO STRENGTHEN EXISTING PROGRAMS IN THE NORTH BUT THESE WILL BE DEALT WITH MORE SPECIFICALLY ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA AND I LOOK FORWARD TO THESE DISCUSSIONS.

THANK YOU.

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